

Title: *Sekai-ichi Hatsukoi ~ The Case of Yokozawa Takafumi, a Short Story*

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Hiyo had been making quite a fuss since some time before in front of the television, watching the video streaming across the screen which showed the earlier Field Day festivities as recorded with a hand-held video camera that Kirishima had borrowed.

“Ah, look look!! There you are, Oniichan!”

“Yeah yeah, I see...” Yokozawa grimaced, glancing off to the side to catch sight of himself on screen, standing at the start line. Looking at himself like this, it was easy to see he was a good decade younger than most of the other fathers who’d been standing beside him—a fact made all the more embarrassing by how uncharacteristically fired up he’d been at the time.

“Oniichan~! Do your best~!!”

“What do you mean *do your best*? You know how it turns out!”

“Oh come on, It doesn’t hurt to cheer you on! Ah—are you *blushing*, Oniichan??”

“No.” Of course he wasn’t; it was only that he couldn’t stand this. The reason Yokozawa had participated in the parent-guardian obstacle race in the first place had been because Kirishima had been saddled with some work he couldn’t get out of at the last minute. While Hiyori hadn’t protested one bit even after her father had informed her he couldn’t take part in her school’s Field Day activities, she’d been overjoyed to learn that Yokozawa would go in his stead.

Once he’d offered to participate, though, Yokozawa had vowed that he wouldn’t embarrass himself, and so, well out of sight of Kirishima or Hiyori, Yokozawa had been running laps every morning and doing a bit of muscle training to prep for this day.

In the end, Kirishima had finished lunching with his author in time to make the afternoon program, but he could hardly run dressed as he was in a suit and dress shoes, so Yokozawa still had to take part.

At the sound of the pistol, Yokozawa had taken off at a dash, clearing the obstacles one by one and easily becoming the first to reach a small table where several cards lay face down. Without hesitating, he picked up the card nearest his feet—and reflexively glanced in a certain direction. Immediately afterward, though, he recovered his senses and shifted in place to face the opposite direction, taking off running again.

“Kyaa!! Oniichan, you’re so cool!”

Yokozawa was now off and running towards where Hiyori was sitting with the other 5th graders. Leaning down, he lifted up Hiyori from where she sat on the front row and took off again towards where the teachers acting as judges were stationed, running with all his might. After having them stamp his card as proof that he’d cleared the task, he then headed for the goal, leaving the other participants in the dust as he crossed the finish line. Hiyori, whose eyes had gone wide with surprise when Yokozawa had scooped her up, was all grins, thrilled that Yokozawa had managed to nab first place.

“You were *amazing* Oniichan! But you really gave me a start when you picked me up!”

“I didn’t have much choice in the matter—I had to just grab you and go!”

“Hehe, yup! All my friends were totally jealous, too! They said I was like a princess!”

Just as Yokozawa allowed himself a moment of relief at his image disappearing from the screen, though, Kirishima cut in with the one question he *absolutely* didn’t want to entertain right now: “That reminds me—what was written on that card anyways?”

“...That’s a secret.”

“*What?* What’s it matter—tell me! Hey—Hiyo, what did it say?”

“Can’t tell you, Papa! It’s mine and Oniichan’s little secret~! And—I’ve got plans with Yuki-chan tomorrow, so I’m off to bed! G’night!”

“What the hell—*tell me!* Why’re you two messing around like this?”

“You heard Hiyo—it’s a secret. I can’t tell you.” Yokozawa had pasted on a calm, superior expression, but inside he was breaking out in cold sweat, all nerves.

The card had had *Your Most Important Person* written on it.

Yokozawa assumed it had been phrased thus intending for the parent who picked it up to run and grab their child, but the moment Yokozawa had read those words, without thinking, he’d sought out Kirishima in the crowd.

“When you picked up that card, though—didn’t you glance up at me for a second?”

“N—*no*. I was looking for Hiyo.”

“Well you weren’t going to find her looking in the *parents’* seats.”

“I know that! I just made a mistake was all.” There was no way in *hell* he was going to let Kirishima know that the first person Yokozawa had thought of when he read *most important person* was him. At Yokozawa’s hesitation, Kirishima didn’t let up on his investigation one bit, though.

“Is it perhaps that you don’t *want* me to know what was written on that card?”

“It’s not *that*—I’m telling you, it was nothing! Don’t get bent out of shape about it—ah, Hiyo, isn’t it almost time for you to be in bed? Don’t think just because it’s the weekend you can stay up past your bedtime. Go brush your teeth.”

“Already done! Sora-chan~ let’s go to bed!”

At hearing his name called, Sorata lifted his head up from where he’d been curled up on the sofa, then jumped down and followed Hiyori into her room. The two had become quite close, behaving as if they’d been friends for the longest time.

Seeing Yokozawa watching the pair head off together with a soft smile on his face, Kirishima jumped in with a low voice, “You tried to give me the slip just now, didn’t you? But I must say I find this hesitation of yours rather suspicious...”

Yokozawa flinched as Kirishima hit the nail on the head. “Why the hell are you so obsessed with that stupid card anyways? It’s a gag for an elementary school *field day*—”

“Because now my sensors are going off.”

“Huh? What’s that supposed to mean? I don’t get you at all.”

Yokozawa shifted away from Kirishima, moving as if to grab his empty beer can—but subsequently found his arms pinned behind his back. “Trying to run away, are we?”

“I—am *not*! I was trying to get my beer is all...!”

“Fess up.”

“No. Way.”

“If you don’t—I’m afraid I’ll have to kiss it out of you.”

“What the hell kind of threat is th—” Twisting around in astonishment at how much they sounded like a flirty couple just now, Yokozawa quickly found his lips captured just as Kirishima had sworn. His breath was taken away by the kiss as his lips were practically molested. “What—are you doing?”

“I just assumed that not confessing was your way of saying you wanted to be kissed.”

“Don’t just make your own assumptions like that!”

“Did you not like it?”

“That’s not something you do out here in the open.” It was one thing if they’d been in Kirishima’s bedroom—but this was the living room where they shared meals and played with Hiyori. He didn’t want to associate anything other than a normal, everyday atmosphere with this place.

“Ah~ it’s fine. Hiyori falls asleep quick.”

“It’s *not* fine. It’s important to make distinctions in this type of situation. Maybe it’d be fine tonight—but you never know when something might go wrong in the future.”

“You sure are hard-headed when it comes to stuff like this—though I gotta say I love that about you.”

“.....”

Just as he was wondering if he should shy away from the lips that had drawn close again, though, Hiyori’s voice drifted in: “Papa!”

“.....?!” Yokozawa tore himself away from Kirishima just as their lips had been about to brush. Fortunately, they’d been nearly sitting on the floor by now and had thus been shielded from view by the sofa, so there was no way Hiyori had spotted them.

A stark contrast to Yokozawa, who was trying to keep his heart from feeling as if it were about to leap from his throat, Kirishima pasted on a cool, unruffled expression. "What's up?"

Fidgeting with herself, Hiyori approached Kirishima, who'd slowly situated himself back sitting properly on the sofa. "Umm do you think...you can get a picture of Yuki-chan from the video we took...?"

"Sure—she should just call us up tomorrow and let me know where to grab the image. I'll teach you how to use the camera's software."

"Yay! Thanks, Papa! I'll text Yuki-chan and let her know, then! G'night you two!" Her worries dispelled, Hiyori flashed them a bright smile and returned to her room.

Yokozawa released the breath he'd been holding at the sudden interruption and felt the tension flow from his body. He felt as if he'd just lost a good ten years off his life from the past five minutes.

"Whew, that was a close one~"

Yokozawa tossed a glare towards Kirishima, who despite his words didn't seem to be feeling one bit worried in the least. "Don't give me that *close one* shit. That's why I said we can't do that kind of thing out here!" He kept his complaints to a softer register to ensure that Hiyori didn't over hear them.

At this, Kirishima crouched low to bring his face closer to Yokozawa's, offering almost in a whisper, "You were totally up for it, though."

"*Who* was...!" But his vision blurred when he admitted to himself that the accusation was...not entirely unfounded. If he'd truly not wanted it, he could have easily protested much more fiercely.

"...So? Shall we continue where we left off?"

"Like hell!" Yokozawa snapped, tone sharp, and shrugged off the hand Kirishima had laid on his shoulder.

"All right then, that concludes this month's print-run decision meeting. Thank you very much, and I look forward to seeing you all again next month."

As Yokozawa called the meeting to a close, all members present rose from their seats to leave. Today's meeting had wound up going relatively smoothly, ending with little in the way of troubles or issues.

Casting a glance down at his watch, Yokozawa noted that they'd finished remarkably early. With this, he could now be assured of a chance to *talk*, and he glanced over at Kirishima, who was seated diagonally across from him.

"...!"

But even though typically Kirishima would be the one to meet his eyes and stare at Yokozawa until he grew uncomfortable and turned away, this time it was *Kirishima* who first averted his gaze—adding insult to injury by darting out of the meeting room with an incomprehensible bitter expression.

"...*Shit*, he got away..."

"Did you say something?" At Yokozawa's muttered curse, Henmi seated at his side turned a puzzled face up at him.

"Just—talking to myself. Can you take care of the rest on your own?"

"Well, yes, but—are you going somewhere?"

"Yeah, sorry; take these documents and head on back without me." And with that vague excuse, he stood in place and moved to chase down Kirishima. "What the hell is his problem..."

Kirishima'd been acting strange all morning. He'd take every opportunity he had to glance over at Yokozawa—but he hadn't *once* made a move to actually come around and bother him in person. Yokozawa had hoped that, with the meeting finished, they'd finally have a chance to talk, but the guy had once again given him the slip.

Shuffling down the hallway past several other coworkers, he finally caught up to Kirishima, standing alone in front of the elevator. "Oi!"

Kirishima turned around at his voice, but his usual smile was nowhere to be seen. "Hm? What is it?" It was altogether quite unsettling.

"We need to talk."

“Then—can it wait? I’ve got plans right now.”

Yokozawa felt a pang of irritation rise up within him at the way Kirishima purposefully glanced down at his watch. “The meeting finished early; surely you’ve got at least ten minutes free.”

“I just remembered something I had to do, so—”

“Give me a break—get in here.” And before anyone could try to stop them, he shoved Kirishima into the nearest free meeting room. Shutting the door behind them, he placed himself directly in front of it so Kirishima couldn’t run away.

“What the hell are you being all pushy for?”

“That’s my line! You’ve been avoiding me all morning... Did I do something?”

That’s what he’d been worried about, really. He knew he had an admittedly rather curt way of speaking and could easily hurt someone without realizing it. It wasn’t impossible that he’d said something unthinkingly hurtful.

“I–no, it’s...it’s not like that...” As Yokozawa stared at him, Kirishima’s face melted into the same uncomfortable expression he’d worn earlier, and he averted his gaze.

Yokozawa had learned that, whenever Kirishima felt cornered, he always tended to turn his eyes just up and to the side—this meant he was hiding something. Confirming this now, he continued to press his case: “Then what *is* it like?”

“Just—it’s nothing you need to worry about, okay? In fact, I’d say it’s my own problem...”

“Why the hell would you need to avoid *me* because something’s wrong with *you*?”

“I can’t...really explain it right now.” Kirishima’s cagey way of making excuses was really starting to wear on Yokozawa. If he’d done something wrong, he really would’ve preferred the guy just come out and say so already.

“Aren’t you a regular *genius* at quibbling over stupid things?”

“Hey—don’t call it *quibbling*. Call it...making my case, emphatically. And—anyways, it’s really nothing. But, I’ll come out and say this in advance: I didn’t do it on

purpose. I just...happened to see it, is all." He continued to dance around the point of the conversation, offering nothing but excuses.

Finally, Yokozawa could take the irritation no more, and he raised his voice, "If you've got something to say, *just spit it out!*"

"I'm sorry! I really didn't mean to see it!" Kirishima suddenly pressed his palms together in front of his face, in a clearly apologetic gesture. But—just being apologized to did absolutely nothing to clear up the *reason*.

"...I still don't understand what you're sorry *for* though."

"...It's that damned card, from the Field Day event," he finally muttered, but failed to expound any further.

"Card...?"

"You know: when you ran for me in that race."

"What race are you... *Ah!*" And now, he finally understood what this whole apology thing was about. At Hiyori's Field Day, Yokozawa had run the Pick-up Race in Kirishima's place as her guardian. It seemed that Kirishima had somehow seen what was written on the card Yokozawa had picked up in that race. They'd refused to tell Kirishima what was written on the card, meaning to keep it a secret between Yokozawa and Hiyori, but...

"When I went to bring Hiyori's folded laundry into her room, it fell off of her bookshelf on accident. It was only after I picked it up that I realized it was *that* card." He was probably babbling like a criminal confessing to a crime he hadn't even been accused of out of sheer guilt. "I mean—I seriously thought it just said '*family*' or something! I...never would've expected *that* to be written on it..."

"....."

The fact that he was being so implicit in his manner of speaking...meant that he'd figured out what it meant that *he'd* been the first person Yokozawa looked to upon seeing the word on the card: *Your Most Important Person*. Thinking back on it even now, his unthinking action had been downright *embarrassing*.

Yokozawa opened his mouth to say his piece before Kirishima inevitably started to tease him for it—but when he looked up, he realized Kirishima was *blushing*. In an

effort to shake off the awkward atmosphere, he ran a hand through his hair. "Geez, what're *you* getting all red-faced for?"

"No, it's just...I can't really...look you in the face right now."

"Huh?"

"I can't help it! I never would've imagined you'd think something like that is all..."

"What're you..." Seeing Kirishima get all worked up over this whole thing wound up making Yokozawa's own face slowly heat up. It seemed feeling uncharacteristically embarrassed at his actions had rendered Kirishima unable to look Yokozawa square on.

Under normal circumstances, this would've been the point where Yokozawa offered him a swift rejection with, *'What the hell are you doing spouting shit that doesn't suit you?'*, but perhaps Kirishima's embarrassment was contagious, for he found himself unable to form words just at the moment.

At a loss for what to say, the pair just stared down at their feet in mutual silence—and the one to break this uncomfortable atmosphere between them turned out to be a tactless little interloper.

"Oh *there* you are, Yokozawa-san!"

"He—Henmi..."

It seemed Henmi had taken no notice of the strange atmosphere permeating the meeting room and continued to babble along at his own speed. "I've been looking all over for you! I needed to ask you about the...eh? What're you doing in here? Both your faces are flushed—the thermostat isn't broken, is it?"

"It's nothing. Let's go, Henmi!"

"Eh? Wa—wait! I was the one who came to find *you*!"

This time it was Yokozawa's turn to turn tail and run, and he quickly slipped out of the meeting room.

His racing heart was unlikely to be quieted any time soon.

~THE END~